

2016 Presidential Migratory Bird Federal Stewardship Award Nomination

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: Holton and Hager Family Confluence Conservation Heritage as part of the Missouri-Mississippi Confluence Conservation Partnership

Partners: Rick Holton, Sr. (private landowner), Warren Hager (private landowner), Missouri Department of Conservation, Ducks Unlimited, Inc.

Project Description: Two private landowners and community leaders, Rick Holton, Sr. and Warren Hager of Missouri, are non-traditional migratory bird stewardship champions whose founding partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has

generated a steadfast allegiance of private landowners, conservation organizations, and public natural resources agencies all working together to conserve habitat in the Missouri-Mississippi Rivers confluence area. Beginning in 2004 and 2007, the Holton and Hager families enrolled in



Photo credit: George Seek

partnership projects with the Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) Program to restore and enhance wetland habitat to benefit migratory bird species, which are so closely tied to the sportsmen's heritage found throughout the Missouri-Mississippi rivers confluence area.

The Missouri-Mississippi Rivers Confluence represents the convergence of the two largest rivers in North America that encompasses nearly 300,000 acres of lands, predominantly in private ownership. The convergence of these two tremendous river systems provides a waterworks sanctuary for fish and wildlife in our nation's heartland, with more than 60% of all birds in the United States utilizing this habitat throughout migration across multiple flyways. Catastrophic flooding in 1993, 1995 and 2008, combined with urban expansion into the floodplain began to generate interest from local landowners and organizations to join federal and state agencies to strategically implement conservation programs.

Both Holton and Hager understood the need to have “landscape conversations” with stakeholders in the community in order to strike a balance between ecological and human needs across the floodplain. The initial restoration projects completed through the PFW Program opened doors for additional conservation efforts with expansion of PFW restoration projects with new landowners, leveraged resources such as the North American Wetland Conservation Act, and the establishment of perpetual conservation easements on both the Holton and Hager family properties.

“Our property has great interest in habitat conservation for waterfowl and other wildlife. We have been fortunate to have a trusting relationship with Ducks Unlimited, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other partners to help design and improve our lands through the Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program,” said private landowner Warren Hager.

Holton and Hager have both risen as community leaders in conservation, through Holton’s establishment and Hager’s close involvement with the Great Rivers Habitat Alliance as well as substantial involvement with nongovernmental organizations such as American Rivers, Ducks Unlimited, and others. The Confluence cooperative conservation effort continued to expand throughout the landscape and is now recognized as the Missouri-Mississippi Confluence Conservation Partnership. This diverse stakeholder-led organization consists of a variety of partners such as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Great Rivers Habitat Alliance, Ducks Unlimited, Inc., USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, Missouri Department of Conservation, The Nature Conservancy, Missouri Audubon, Pheasant and Quail Forever and private landowners and also the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Missouri Department of Natural Resources, and the Conservation Federation of Missouri. The Holton and Hager families’ foundational partnership with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service serves as a prime example of how public servants and private individuals are leading conservation into the 21st century.”